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Affirmation

AN INDEPENDENT VOICE FOR:
UNITED METHODISTS FOR LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, AND TRANSGENDER CONCERNS
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Special points of interest:

- Reaction to the trial of Beth Stroud
- White Privilege & Anti-Racism
- Reflections on the Retreat
- Membership
- Strategic Visioning
- Book Reviews

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Stroud's Credentials Stripped

Statement by Peggy R. Gaylord, Affirmation December 3, 2004

Over and over, we heard of Beth Stroud's exceptional ministry; no one contested this. But they stripped her of her hard-earned ministerial credentials. What else could we expect of a jury whose pool had excluded self-avowed, practicing conscientious objectors to the *Book of Discipline*?

Over and over, we heard that Beth Stroud is an exceptional person of integrity, and that her ministry is extraordinary. Yet, they did not leave her credentials intact so that she could more easily transfer as clergy to another denomination if she now chose, in the face of clear rejection from the United Methodist Church, her family of origin. This is clearly a punitive attitude, not a loving and

supportive one, not one of "open hearts, open minds, and open doors." The penalty is meant to continue to silence our lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender laity and clergy. If she hadn't spoken the "unspeakable," she would still be a pastor in the UMC today.

While Beth Stroud is an exceptional pastor with extraordinary gifts, she is not, by far, neither the first nor the last. Many others of exceptional gifts and graces have been driven from the church either explicitly or implicitly--self-selected United Methodist "good girls" and "good boys" who respond to the call, and then quietly disappear without fussing when they realize their sexuality; those challenged and

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Beth Stroud's Trial:

A Lesbian is Defrocked by the United Methodist Church

BY:

It's like Christ's story all over again! Beth Stroud was an extremely capable and transformational pastor in the United Methodist Church until December 2, 2004. That was the day her denomination's court defrocked her for being a lesbian in a committed relationship with another person of the same sex. She is no longer a clergy

person, and loses the obligations and privileges she had in that career path. And we lose another pastor with exceptional connection to the Holy Spirit.

The trial was much like Christ's trial leading to His crucifixion. The Pharisees were there, telling us she

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summarily dismissed at some point during their ordination process; clergy quietly transferred to another denomination if they will keep quiet; even those lost to suicide--because how can one make sense of God's clear call to the United Methodist Church in the present United Methodist Church of rejection and religious and spiritual violence?

Ironically, many discovered their sexual orientation as they were walking closer to God in United Methodist "family gatherings," such as Sunday Schools, youth groups, Bible study, camps, retreats, and seminaries. Now they've been disowned. How dare the Church put rules and laws before the Holy Spirit?

Does no one remember Jesus' warning about the Pharisees? When will the United Methodist Church become the Church of Jesus Christ, the One who included ALL without exception, not the church of the 51% majority rule documented in the *Book of Discipline* every four years? The Discipline itself states that it is not to be considered either "sacrosanct" or "infallible."

Yes, as the prosecuting counsel stated, Beth Stroud will still have her call to ministry--but the Church has violated that call, and has impeded how that call can be lived out. It is the United Methodist denomination's loss--one more time. Raised, nurtured, and mentored in the UMC, Beth is now cast out. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people will continue to be violated until the Church celebrates the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives, and realizes that the guidelines in the "standards" are not prerequisites to being filled with the Spirit. God will call Beth Stroud to new avenues of ministry, perhaps even calling her to appeal yesterday's decision, as God has thus far clearly led her on her path to bring Light and expose how the Church is slamming the door on God's faithful people.

Until the UMC can live up to its "Open Hearts. Open Minds. Open Doors." media campaign it should be loudly protested. The Church cannot boldly lie and continue to get away with it. We must be vigilant in bringing the Church to its own accountability and the accountability of the gospel of Jesus Christ. What would John Wesley say? What would Jesus, who was silent on homosexuality, but abhorred religious injustices and spiritual abuse, do? The Holy Spirit calls us to love as Jesus loved and work to redeem what Jesus hated.

Rev. Peggy R. Gaylord, Co-Spokesperson National Affirmation: United Methodists for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Concerns

Affirmation Newsletter

This Affirmation newsletter is a quarterly publication.

Only Affirmation's elected spokespersons may represent the official positions of this organization. Opinions here, signed or unsigned, are those of the writers, and do not necessarily represent the opinions of Affirmation.

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Mission Statement

Affirmation: United Methodist is an activist caucus of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people, our families, and friends, organized to speak for ourselves. Together we:
Proclaim a gospel of respect, love, and justice;
Relentlessly pursue policies and processes that support full participation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people in all areas and levels of The United Methodist Church;
Overcome the barriers that diminish our common humanity by excluding or judging people because of their race, gender, class, or physical abilities;
Empower people to undertake works of inclusion and justice where they are.

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broke the rules and needs to be punished. At least, that is what one elderly lady from a local congregation told me after the conviction while the Trial Court was deciding the punishment. The religious leaders (Judicial Council) were there by preventing a quarter of the jury pool from serving because they would not agree to follow the Discipline provisions explicitly.

Pontius Pilot was there also. Bishop Yeakel, the presiding judge, showed great skill in jurisprudence. But I suspect he wished he could have washed his hands of the whole sordid matter when he saw how it was going to turn out.

The phony charges were there. The wonderful things Beth offered the church and did for the church in her career were ignored. What genital contact she had with her partner was much of the focus of the specifications. Without those genital contact admissions, the trial would not have happened.

The mob was there, calling for blood. The prosecuting pastor was rumored to be reluctant to take on the role he was asked to perform. But when it came to speaking to the trial court before they went off to decide on the punishment, he called for just about the ultimate punishment, removal of credentials.

Judas was there too. One of the volunteer bailiffs, presumably a clergyman, talked to us in a nervous and distracted manner after the trial was over. He told us he was shocked that the punishment (defrocking) was so severe. It seemed that he was just beginning to realize he had 'blood' on his hands for helping facilitate Beth's unjust persecution. I pity his growing guilt. Sometimes the truth comes to us too late.

Beth stood on the high ground with powerful integrity and love for her persecutors. She called the Bishop who brought charges against her, her brother in Christ. She even hugged the pastor who led her prosecution and called for her defrocking.

Beth sacrificed herself by taking the strain of being tried and expelled from the UMC clergy, and dramatically losing her career opportunities in the field where she has stellar skills, a powerfully calling, and accomplishments. She sacrificed herself in this way so that others may have life and live it abundantly.

And clearly Jesus was there too, weeping for His church that persecutes the marginalized and does not love the way He taught us.

But we are thankful for martyrs like Beth who make great sacrifice to bring the United Methodist Church back to Christianity. The Holy Spirit is with her and us in this sacred work.

As part of the progressive movement in the United Methodist Church, I had great dread before attending the Beth Stroud trial. I wondered how could I sit there for two days witnessing a travesty and not do anything to stop it. Frankly, I feel dirty from having witnessed this low point in Christ's church in the world. When I went back to work Friday, my co-workers asked me how the Methodist church can defrock this pastor for just being a lesbian. It made me ashamed to be a United Methodist (again).

Jim Palmquist Affirmation National Council

Walls---or---No Walls

A Poem from Ann Freeman Price of NJ
(Dedicated to Beth Stroud)

the rules are there
to separate
who's in
who's out
and as the law
gains strength
it builds the wall

it is not new
these walls
the church creates

in other times
the law divided
blacks and whites
or stopped the women
from the service
that ordained
all justified
by Scripture quotes
and moral arguments

and yet the Spirit moves
a mighty church
to shout apologies
long after racist walls
came tumblin' down
leaving the rocks
and boulders to still be
sifted through

the Spirit whispered
strength to women
and with the strength
the women kept on
keeping on
till finally they
kneel at last
with bishops' hands
upon their heads
ordaining to new ministries
and feminist feet
kicked bits of stone
from fallen walls

and now
within the church that
claims such open doors

the law is clear again
if gay or lesbian
you may not
be ordained
or if ordained
you may be stripped
and stone is placed
on stone as walls
and church
disrupt the lives
once more

but Spirit wind
is blowing now
feeling the heart break
that spills far beyond
one soul
so stripped
the Spirit carries the
echo of the song
that holds the gentleness
and the anger together

the Spirit breathes
and with each breath
shares witness
that walls hold weakness
within themselves
and this wall too
has cracks sprung
loose and spreading fast

for numbers grow
of those who join
their hands and hearts
to say with new resolve
"We will keep loving---
we will keep living---
we will make room
until the walls are
pebbles underfoot."

----Ann Freeman Price

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Amazing Grace Under Fire

Reflections from the Opening Day of Beth Stroud's Trial--December 1, 2004

by Peggy R. Gaylord and Vivian R. Waltz

"We are without power." The words of Bishop Yeakel seemed a clear metaphor for what many of us were feeling as we sat in the dark and cold gymnasium waiting for the backup generator to be connected so that the trial could begin.

The jury selection was completed. We had been informed that anyone who could not, according to their conscience, "uphold the order and discipline of the church" as it is currently written in *The Book of Discipline* had been dismissed from the pool. No conscientious objectors allowed; conscientious assenters welcomed! When acting as the Church of Jesus Christ, how can one be mandated to set aside conscience in a matter which may involve a higher sense of morality than the rulebook reflects? Should we remind ourselves that *The Book of Discipline* is not the inspired word of God? It is a record of a simple majority of many votes at General Conference, a mere snapshot in time.

In his opening statement, the prosecuting counsel for the Church evoked the image of a boundary line. He explained that the Reverend Beth Stroud has crossed that boundary line, and must be held accountable to the "sacred trust" of *The Book of Discipline* and her covenant with her United Methodist clergy colleagues. "That boundary line is not to be debated here," he solemnly intoned. "The General Conference is where that boundary line is set."

Boundaries set at General Conference are not disembodied, theoretical standards. Ideally, they are guidelines for living our lives as faithful people. The legislation from General Conference has to be lived out and tested every day in real people's lives. The *Book of Discipline* itself states that we as United Methodists "do not see the *Discipline* as sacrosanct or infallible, but we do consider it a document suitable to our heritage" ("Episcopal Greetings," p. v).

John Wesley, the father of Methodism, knew the danger of getting caught in what Beth Stroud's defense counsel called a "maze of theological

codification." What seems on the surface to be clear-cut was always subject to a deeper analysis in light of Wesley's experience of the Holy Spirit. The defense counsel gave the example of Wesley's reflection on 1 Corinthians 14:34. John Wesley allowed for an exception to the seemingly straightforward prohibition of women speaking and teaching in church because he had experienced the preaching of women who were undeniably "under the extraordinary impulse of the Holy Spirit."

Beth Stroud is a United Methodist pastor who is under the extraordinary impulse of the Holy Spirit. All evidence we have seen and heard testifies to that. She is also, maybe incidentally, maybe by Divine Intention, a lesbian--someone who God called to see the world through that lens of her own sexuality. She began what she called "a journey of truth-telling" with a letter to her congregation and her "Walking in the Light" sermon "which expresses how I have experienced the love of God and the grace of Jesus Christ in my own life as a lesbian."

When asked to share about her call to ministry, Beth included describing a time when she was working as a writer interviewing openly gay and lesbian pastors and rabbis for an article. As she was walking the streets of New York City, going from one interview to the next, she looked up at the church steeple ahead and heard an internal voice saying, "I don't want you to write about this, I want you to do it."

Why would she choose to return to the United Methodist Church in the Philadelphia area? She said that the United Methodist Church is home and the Philadelphia area is home, where she had been raised in the church, the place where she was nurtured. It was here, at home, where she would have mentors.

Today, those who should have been Beth Stroud's mentors seemed more like the Pharisees. Their focus was the letter of the law rather than the

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Spirit of the law, of which Jesus spoke. Because she is a "self-avowed" homosexual, it was the "practicing" that needed to be proven.

Witnessing the prosecuting counsel's uncivilized inquisition into Beth and her partner's "genital sexual activity" (the poetic words of Judicial Council Decision #920) was nothing short of excruciating. Beth's response to those who were trespassing against her was nothing short of amazing grace under fire. She told the court that she and Chris do all kinds of things that other loving couples do, like work at their jobs, shop for groceries together, take care of the pets together, and also "show our love sexually and with our bodies."

Repeatedly, the prosecuting side went back to her having always had the option of celibacy, implying that she had the option of claiming she was celibate. ("Don't ask, don't tell...") Offered "an out," Beth once again chose a fuller answer of

honesty, according to her profound sense of integrity and her unwavering moral compass.

The first day ended with one of the jurors asking Beth why she had pleaded "not guilty" if she acknowledged the charges/specifications to be true. Beth explained that to plead "guilty" would be to say that she had violated sacred trust as an ordained pastor, and "I believe that I have not violated the sacred trust as an ordained United Methodist clergy person."

Beth Stroud is more than worthy of the United Methodist Church's sacred trust. She has entrusted to us her hope "that through my witness and the witness of the trial, people who are alienated from God because of their sexual orientation might hear the good news and come to a relationship with Jesus Christ."

Rev. Peggy R. Gaylord, Co-Spokesperson
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Did You Know? HIV/AIDS Quick Update

On June 5, 1981, the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued its first warning about a relatively rare form of pneumonia among a small group of young gay men in Los Angeles, which was later determined to be AIDS-related. Since that time, more than 60 million people have been infected with HIV worldwide, including almost 40 million estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS today.

This year's World AIDS Day focused on women, girls, and HIV/AIDS, and how gender inequity fuels the AIDS epidemic.

In the US:

The epidemic is taking an increasing toll on women in the US. Women of color, particularly African American women, have been especially hard hit, and represent the majority of new AIDS cases among women.

Since the first cases of what would later become known as AIDS were reported in the United States in June 1981, approximately 1.5 million people in the U.S. have been infected with HIV, including more than 500,000 who have already died.

Heterosexual transmission accounts for a growing proportion of newly diagnosed AIDS cases, rising from 3% in 1985 to 31% in 2003.

The South has the greatest number of people estimated to be living with AIDS, deaths among persons with AIDS, and AIDS diagnoses in 2003, followed by the Northeast, West, and Midwest.

Globally:

The HIV/AIDS epidemic has already claimed over 20 million lives, and another 39 million people are currently estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS worldwide. HIV/AIDS cases have been reported in all

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Staying Healthy During Anti-Gay Campaigns

From: The Reconciling Ministries Network Digest Friday, December 10, 2004

Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender people, and their heterosexual allies can take concrete steps to resist feelings of isolation, stress, and sadness in the face of anti-gay campaigns, according to a new publication by the Institute for Gay and Lesbian Strategic Studies (IGLSS).

Communities in eleven states enacted divisive anti-gay referenda in November's election. In the course of these campaigns to limit the rights of gay people, well-publicized stereotypes and hostility became dominant themes that challenged the psychological well being of GLBT people.

"I've heard many stories about fear, sadness, and a sense of loss from people all over the country," noted Dr. Glenda Russell, author of the report. "Putting the civil rights of one group to a vote takes an enormous psychological toll on members of that group, as well as on communities and families."

After Michigan voters amended the state constitution to ban same-sex marriages, Greg Varnum saw this impact first-hand at Eastern Michigan University. He described the aftermath of the vote: "In my role as student coordinator of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Resource Center, I have seen people dealing with surprise, anger, and sadness, with a sense of powerlessness, and a desire to want to know what to do next."

The report, entitled "Surviving and Thriving in the Midst of Anti-Gay Politics," presents three primary strategies: analysis, action, and allies. GLBT people should analyze the homophobia present in the campaign, take action to resist anti-gay efforts, and draw on the support of heterosexual allies. Russell noted that heterosexual allies play a particularly important role in reducing feelings of isolation in addition to the value of their political support.

"The research on how people get through the tough political times shows that these strategies work," according to author Glenda Russell, a psychologist and IGLSS senior research associate. "Although you can't shut out the negative messages about gay people that blanket a community during a campaign, we can respond to them in constructive ways."

Read the full report at: www.iglss.org/media/files/Angles-72.pdf

The Institute for Gay and Lesbian Strategic Studies is a nonprofit, independent think tank based in Amherst, Massachusetts. IGLSS provides policy-oriented research on issues of importance to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities. All IGLSS publications are available at www.iglss.org.

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40 Years, 40 Heroes

The 40th Anniversary of the GLBT Civil Rights Movement

Join us in celebrating the 40th anniversary of the GLBT civil rights movement! Take part in a week of programs, special events, parties and celebrations. **Join us on Sunday, May 1, for a National Celebration at Independence Hall**, the birthplace of our civil rights movement, as we honor 40 Heroes who have made a difference!

Complete information will be online in early January.

<http://www.pridefest.org/>

A press release and the 40 heroes are listed on this website.

White Privilege, Anti-Racist Work, Building Multi-cultural Efforts, and Creating Change

Peggy R. Gaylord, Co-Spokesperson

Several weeks ago I was asked to write some reflections on the Coalition meeting with some of our partners in Chicago where we focused on discussing how to become, as mostly white people, committed to be more anti-racist in our work, and how to build a more multi-cultural movement after the fact. Also I was asked to write something about white privilege, diversity, and inclusion. There were many references to the "train" having already "left the station." For Affirmation, where was our concern 30 years ago to look to others who may have had the same or similar concerns, but who had many other concerns to juggle as well? Who are we to ask now, at the point that we may need them more than they need us?

I have decided to offer some reflections of my own, as a person with white privilege, strictly personal, and not on behalf of Affirmation; in my own life, in this Chicago meeting, in my LGBT work over the years, and some ideas from my participation in the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, *Creating Change*, conference in St. Louis last week. I think we all need to examine ourselves. I believe that if I share personally, it may allow you to remember some of the benchmarks in your own history. If I say something stupid, I expect that to reflect on me and not the organization. However, I think sometimes it is good to be as honest as possible even if it's not politically correct in the moment. I believe that speaking honestly has the potential of leading to greater understanding.

"Growing Up"

My mom had been Presbyterian, but when she moved to our village in high school, she had the choice of joining either the Baptist or Methodist churches; thank God she chose the Methodists. I am pretty thoroughly WASP on both sides of my family. Lacking a full, rich tradition of something else, I have come to claim the French Huguenot perspective, the ones who didn't agree with the status quo, those troublemakers in the church.

I grew up just outside a little village of maybe 200 people, in a rural upstate NY community. My school was 12 miles away, another village in dairy country. Our K-12 was about 2000 students. I can remember when the first black family moved into our school district. The twins, a girl and a boy, were put into my third grade class. They were the only "Negroes" in my entire school. When I complained to my mom about the boy being mean to other students, she tried to explain to me that life probably wasn't too easy for him.

I also grew up in a large manufacturing and hi-tech county in the 60s, although I lived rurally. In the mid-80s, we were the third largest hi-tech area behind only the Boston corridor and Silicon Valley. We had a great amount of diversity

among our region, but predominantly ethnic and national diversity, not so much racial diversity.

Before I started school, there was a Negro couple whom I knew, that my family was friendly with. I think my dad had done some excavation work for them (they lived in the only new brick ranch house--with a fireplace--built in our area). I suspect that my grandmother did some housecleaning for them occasionally, since they both worked, one of them at IBM. My images of black people were that they were richer and in a higher socio-economic class than we.

"The Limits of Not Being Prejudiced"

I did notice that when I made my first woman partner a caftan, my mother didn't ask whether I was serious about her (I was not "out"). However, when I was making a shirt for a black man, my mother did inquire how serious I was about this man. It's always interesting to come up against the limits of the teachings your parents have given you. Be tolerant/accepting, but only to a certain fine line, I guess. Well, I didn't tell Mom that I could be very serious about him, that I was in love with Norton.

"I Don't Get It"

Sometimes I feel like I probably really don't get it. I can't really give up my white privilege in a physical sense. At my age, I'm not going to inject pigment into my skin to observe people's reactions (as one author I read did in the 60s) to explore the experience of being black in America.

Sometimes I'm very suspicious of why we're doing these sessions--it still sounds to me like it's primarily in our own best white interests, often not really seeing a bigger picture or beyond our own perceptions. At *Creating Change*, I kept hearing how "gay marriage" is not the priority for most people, it's really a hotter topic for those in higher socio-economic positions. The visible agenda does not serve low-income people well. Anti-discrimination laws overlook the homeless, not ensuring that partners will be kept together in shelters. Hate crime laws are problematic because the criminal justice system is already so inherently racist. Even in one of the workshops which I found most valuable, I still noticed the assumptions; everyone was asked to read aloud and to read silently. Most don't expect people to have trouble with reading despite the failures of our school systems.

Sometimes I think we're just a bunch of white folks sitting in these small groups, processing in white folks' ways, and what is this going to accomplish? It's the same list of basic facilitator questions regardless of the topic. In planning a meeting, whose agenda is it? Is it, here's our mission statement; come join us; or, who's interested in this issue and then together we'll develop a mission? Do we offer food, child-care, easy access to transportation?

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"Mixed Loyalties"

I remember how a friend of mine told a story once in our local Affirmation--that when she went to college at SUNY-Albany, the blacks wanted her in their organization, the women in theirs, and the gays and lesbians in theirs, with none of them understanding her overlapping loyalties, the intersections in these issues for her. Another African-American friend more recently described her trying to juggle many responsibilities in many organizations, feeling like she can't do justice to any of her roles--and then to be criticized for it by others if she seems to fall short, often making racial comments about her "incompetence."

Well, you know what? I feel some of that, too. Put that on top of my own survival issues (I live pretty marginally these days)--I was sobbing in the middle of the night after the meeting in Chicago, wondering what else can I take on personally when I'm already operating on overload? Sometimes I'm just very aware of how the discussions keep saying over and over that I'll have to give up my own privilege/power to make room for someone else. You know what? I think I'm ready.

I'm embarrassed to tell my friend, Paul, that we're going to talk a few hours as a coalition about our racism. Paul was the first African-American talk show host in China, who's working as a peacemaker with his wife in the Middle East these days. Everything seems at such an elementary level. But, maybe we need to look at this in a different fundamental sense. Thinking of what I heard at *Creating Change*, thinking of how I've seen life, I think that we truly do need to build relationships first. I've learned the most when I've loved or cared for someone, and was able to glimpse some of the way that they experience life.

"Relationship Building for a Multi-cultural Movement"

How do we start building relationships? Sitting in Chicago in one small group of five, we were assigned the question "Where are we as the progressive movement (after GC2004)?" Our white recorder was ready to start jotting down our responses, his recorded first. When we looked at each other to see who would respond next, a lull came over the group. Finally, an African-American man asked, what do you mean by "progressive?" Our recorder immediately commented that the definition of "progressive" wasn't our assignment. It seemed such a typical way to cut off someone's voice, though I doubted it was intentional in this case.

I responded that I thought some of us in the group did not know what was being meant by "progressive," and that maybe it would be helpful to discuss that. Phil Lawson (African-American) said that it wasn't clear to him whether he could "buy into" a progressive movement until he knew

what that meant specifically, ie, what program was to be implemented. Another white woman asked him what he would mean by "progressive." He began sharing his views: first, he thinks the war needs to be stopped, like stopping the abusive husband first, and then talking about the situation.

Later Phil reminded us that we need to change the church because of the stature and influence it has to change society and the world. During the discussion, two of us who had been at the May post-General Conference coalition meeting also shared that Affirmation and other groups involved in planning the day had not been acknowledged explicitly. We ran out of time, our recorder had not written down anything, and the sheet was handed to me to report on. As I finished jotting notes, Phil reminded me to add the part that Affirmation hasn't been acknowledged appropriately. I looked at the other two Affirmation members, and our silent consensus would have been not to bring it up.

Sitting, waiting my turn to report, seeing Phil's "encouraging" nod, meaning "you should," I remembered that one of the reasons I became a spokesperson was because I say things even when I'm uncomfortable hearing myself say them. How could I overlook his insistence? If I didn't say it, what would that communicate to him, when I knew in my heart that he was right and he was being supportive? Whether we were conscious of it or not in that moment, when I had helped ensure that the voices of him and his friend were heard, he helped me to be heard as well. Listen, hear, reflect, be sure to hear each other. I find relationship building to be challenging in every area of my life, and often more so as the differences seem to increase, or as I have a greater personal investment.

"Creating Change"

While I would like to share much with you about the *Creating Change* conference, I want to focus on one idea here, building a broader vision of social justice. One participant observed that in every industrialized nation that has a version of gay marriage, universal health care has already been in place for many years. Can we live in a world that allows so little for so many? Can we imagine building a world that leaves no person behind and in which no one will be discarded?

One observation that kept coming up was that the intersection of our issues always takes us to class. This discussion is still not a part of our fabric. We cannot have a social justice movement based on fear, hate, and in the myth of scarcity. For most of us, privilege and oppression is operating simultaneously; we need to deepen our work around power and privilege. As people of faith, the means we use to address conflict must agree with the ends we seek. Relationship building is the work, not a piece of the work. What we do affects all others. Lastly, "always remember that we are the ones we have been waiting for." We need to become our own messiahs.

Reflections on the Affirmation Retreat

Nancy Giese, Broad Street UMC, Columbus OH

It took six extra hours at the airport, changed flights, an el train, and a long bus ride to get there, but it was all worth it. Where was I after all this? I was at the International Conference Center in up-town Chicago, IL. I had traveled there for my first experience with Affirmation. Even though I would not know anyone, I was eager to meet new friends.

It didn't take long for me to feel right at home. We got acquainted as we likened ourselves to an assortment of baby shoes that were provided. Some were cute soft booties, other little Mary Janes, some were sandals, and others rain boots or retro tennis shoes. The weekend was meant to focus on the inward journey, and be a time of renewal and refreshment after General Conference.

It more than lived up to its billing.

Some of us took the opportunity to walk a labyrinth in downtown Chicago and many of us also hiked the few blocks to see Lake Michigan. We had times of worship, discussions, and activities all designed to help us not only find our own center, but also to extend that to imagining in creative ways how to be a totally inclusive church. We created a mural from magazine cutouts of what this inclusive church might look like. Then we added what it would take for the UM church to become this reality. With hope renewed and faith inspired, we left committed to living into God's dream for an inclusive church.

Hearts On Fire

Eighth National Reconciling Convocation September 2-5, 2005: Friday-Monday Labor Day Weekend Lake Junaluska, North Carolina

Expect Exciting Worship, Engaging Bible Study, Challenging Workshops, and Creative Community with many talented leaders including Bishop Minerva Carcaño, Bishop Richard Wilke, Grace Imathiu, Dr. Jeffrey Kuan, Gayle Carlton Felton, Mark Miller, Heather Elkins, Youtha Hardman-Cromwell, Dr. Karen Oliveto, Jorge Lockward, Randy Miller, Martha Juillerat, James Preston and more...

Nestled in the serenity of the Smoky Mountains in Western North Carolina, Lake Junaluska is located in Haywood County, known for the 18 peaks over 6,000 feet, more than any county east of the Mississippi River. The 200-acre lake is surrounded by 1,200 acres of beautiful rolling hills and valleys. Those who have visited have described their "Junaluska Experience" as a renewal of the heart, mind, body, and spirit.

Call for convocation presentation/workshop proposals: To expand the variety of dynamic experiences at convocation, RMN issues a call for presentation/workshop proposals. If you or someone you can recommend is an experienced qualified workshop leader, please send a proposal summarizing both expertise and content focus to [REDACTED].

Mark your calendars and stay tuned for more information!

The Gift and Grace of Membership

By Vivian Waltz

When persons unite with a local United Methodist church, they are asked to keep vows. Some of the vows are:

- ♦ To renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of the world, and repent of their sin.
- ♦ To accept the freedom and power God gives them to resist evil, injustice, and oppression.
- ♦ To serve as Christ's representatives in the world.
- ♦ To do all in their power to strengthen the ministries of the United Methodist Church.
- ♦ To faithfully participate in its ministries by their prayers, presence, gifts, and service.

Many of us in Affirmation are members or pastors of local congregations. Others have not found a United Methodist congregation where we can feel at home. Yet none of us would be involved in Affirmation if we weren't connected to the United Methodist Church, however loosely. So I think the membership vows of our denomination may hold something of value for us.

Having been raised with a "Christians are always nice" theology, the words about spiritual forces of wickedness and evil powers in the world used to make me squirm in my pew. Injustice and oppression spoke of far away realities like war and famine. Being Christ's representative in the world meant filling my offering envelope, bringing cans at Thanksgiving, staying overnight at the homeless shelter. The ministries of the UMC were right there in my local congregation.

But gradually, and sometimes with instantaneous clarity, I was disillusioned and even shattered to learn that the spiritual forces of wickedness and the evil powers of this world exist *within* the Church as well as outside. I felt the spiritual forces of wickedness, evil powers, injustice, and oppression at General Conference in Cleveland and Pittsburgh. I've perceived the spiritual forces of wickedness, evil powers, injustice, and oppression in fellow United Methodist speakers and writers. I've witnessed the spiritual forces of wickedness, evil powers, injustice, and oppression in gay clergy trials. I have become more familiar with the spiritual forces of wickedness, evil powers, injustice, and oppression than I ever imagined possible, and against my most Christian will.

What does it mean to be a member of a group that is waging a fierce battle of resistance within the Church? How are we serving as Christ's representatives in the world within and without United Methodism? How can we strengthen the ministries and/or create new opportunities for ministry in the United Methodist Church, however broken we know it to be? What does it mean to support our mission with our prayers, our presence, our gifts, and our service?

At root, these vows are spiritual commitments. How do we claim our righteousness, and embrace God's succor to continue the fight? How do we wait upon the Lord, renew our strength, and "mount up with wings of eagles" as promised by the prophet Isaiah?

In coming issues of our newsletter, your membership committee will explore the spiritual implications and possibilities that being part of Affirmation offers each of us. Stay tuned!

GETTING BI: Voices of Bisexuals Around the World

Edited by Robyn Ochs and Sarah E. Rowley

An Anthology of Diverse Voices from 32 Countries

- Information and articles about bisexuality
- Fiction and non-fiction bibliographies
- Great quotes from Alfred Kinsey to Ann Landers to Boy George
- Contact information for organizations around the world
- Photos, cartoons, and more!

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Out of Parish Ministry and Put on the Shelf

By Judy WestLee

This spring's Annual Conference was a milestone of sorts for me. I was ordained an elder in the Minnesota Annual Conference, and served parishes for 10 years. Then I came out to my bishop and cabinet. I had a very public union ceremony with my life partner, Janet -- 10 years ago this past June. I went on Leave of Absence.

This annual conference was my official retirement from ministry. It really happened 10 years ago when I could no longer serve local parishes. All of the invitations for the retiree dinners, etc. came in the mail. I was invited to share my wisdom in a Retirement Booklet. (I asked Janet: "What advice do I give? Lie like hell if you want to stay in ministry!!") I responded to none of it.

As I explained to a valued colleague, I didn't trust myself to give a retirement speech. I was afraid it would be an angry speech. I've heard those, and I didn't want to give one myself. So, I stayed home that June evening.

A week or so later a small box arrived. Inside was a plaque commemorating my 10 years of ministry. It is probably the prettiest plaque I have ever seen. It sat several days on our dining room table as I tried to discern what to do with it.

Another valued colleague had a wonderful suggestion: Let's wait until I retire from all paid work, ie, from working for a TV station, weekly newspaper reporting-photography-editing, not-for-profit organization public relations, state executive director of Special Olympics, and from parish ministry. Let's have a grand party, and then hang up the plaque with some other mementos of other careers.

That's the plan. I'm not sure of the timetable. It may be four years from now, or it may be longer. In the meantime, I have put the plaque back in its box, and it sits on some really good books on one of my bookshelves. (If you ever saw my office you would understand that brand of organizing entirely.) At first I thought it was a tad cavalier and

disrespectful, but then I decided that is about how the United Methodist Church has treated me for the past 10 years.

If I had given that retirement speech, I would have said something like this:

First of all, to all my parishioners who allowed me to be their pastor, a heartfelt thank you. It was an amazing honor.

To my colleagues who like to consider themselves liberal and open, don't pat yourself on the back yet. You really haven't changed anything. You have called off the attack dogs, but you haven't instigated a change in the openness of United Methodist Ministry.

To my colleagues who were glad I went on Leave of Absence so that we wouldn't have the expense of a church trial, I just don't get how you do practical theology. How can you continue to baptize babies as members of the household of faith, but when they become adults, you deny about 10 percent of them full membership benefit because they are gay? None of us chooses this way of being. It's how God created us. But you decide whether or not God did a good job in creating us. Think about that. And remember that every time you baptize a baby you declare "Through baptism you are incorporated by the Holy Spirit into God's new creation, and made to share in Christ's royal priesthood. We are all one in Christ Jesus. With joy and thanksgiving we welcome you as members of the family of Christ (*then whispered*) unless, of course, you end up being gay, and then you are only a second class member of the family."

And lastly to all of you, I tell you the smartest thing I ever did was to ask Janet Marie to be my life partner.

I wish you shalom!

BOOK REVIEWS

And God Loves Each One***A Resource for Dialogue about Sexual Orientation by Ann Thompson Cook***

"Sexuality is a good gift of God, and we believe persons may be fully human only when that gift is acknowledged and affirmed!"

The booklet *And God Loves Each One*, by Ann Thompson Cook, is a valuable resource in carrying out the charge of our UM Social Principles to acknowledge and affirm human sexuality in its wondrous diversity. The 2004 second edition, published by Dumbarton United Methodist Church in Washington, DC, is an ongoing response to the increasingly exclusionary posture of Christian denominations toward LGBT persons which began to be codified in the early 1980s.

And God Loves Each One offers a succinct exposition (20 pages) of the complexities of sexual expression, and the impact of the religious condemnation of non-heterosexual orientation on real people. The booklet focuses on lesbian, gay, and bisexual orientations (biological sex and gender diversity are the subject of a companion book, *Made in God's Image*) and includes direct, concise, and thoughtful responses to common questions and misperceptions. It offers a scriptural perspective of love and reconciliation toward all God's people, reminding us that time and again Jesus overturned religious and social traditions whose purpose was to condemn people. The last pages of the booklet give resources for more information: films, videos, print resources, organizations, and supportive religious groups.

If you are looking for a short, user-friendly, educational resource about the issues and experiences of lesbian, gay, and bisexual persons and the Church's call to welcome each one, I highly recommend *And God Loves Each One*.

by Vivian Waltz

Transgender Studies

By Diane DeLap

I spent about two and a half years in the late '80s as an assistant editor for the international transgender magazine *Transgender Tapestry*, which is a publication of the International Foundation for Gender Education. One of my major responsibilities was reviewing potential articles for reprint. During that period, having read literally thousands of articles on transgender issues and lifestyle, I grew very tired of reading two types of articles. The first was by an expert either in or outside the Trans community explaining what being Trans is all about. The second was what I came to call "my transition story." There were thousands of each of these, especially the transition stories, and I grew to dislike them both. Writers of both types tended to make the same mistake - thinking that their limited experience with the Trans community qualified them as experts to speak about the wider experience. The Trans community is too varied and too closeted (still) to allow broad generalizations. That background is necessary for you to understand why I believe that the two books I review here are extraordinary examples of excellent resources about the Transgender community.

***Made in God's Image*, by Ann Thompson Cook is a publication of Dumbarton UMC, Washington, DC, and is jointly distributed with Reconciling Ministries Network. While this book does provide an excellent summary of "Trans 101" definitions in the chapter "Gender beyond either/or," perhaps its most effective chapter is entitled "Voices...of hurt and hope." That, coupled with the many photos and the chapter introducing the people in the photos, is most effective in putting faces on the transgender community. Too often the words "transgender" or "transsexual" are coupled with images from Jerry Springer's show of people who live on the fringes of society. It's**

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important to show, as this book does, that Trans people are real, hard-working, members of society with hopes and dreams not much different than the rest of society. They are fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, co-workers and friends. They can be members of your church or former members who left when they heard criticism in the church of those who live on the fringe. Rather than attempt to give her interpretation of what it means to be transgender, author Ann Thompson Cook lets those who live the experience daily express their feelings. The book is short, only twenty three pages including a good reference page and a links page that includes most of the supportive GLBT religious groups (except Affirmation!). This book provides a good, inexpensive (\$5.95 singly or \$3.50 in quantities of 10 or more) basis for an introductory study of this important and little understood part of God's creation.

***She's Not There* by Jennifer Finney Boylan (2003, Broadway Books, New York)** is not your average "transition story." For contrast, do a Google search for "gender transition" and take your pick. What sets Jenny Boylan's account apart is the fact that she brings a lifetime of experience as published author and college English professor to the task. It's skill at one's craft that distinguishes her ability to tell her story without getting lost in the usual egocentrism of transition stories. The book was a New York Times bestseller, but with my usual skepticism about transition stories, I was reluctant to pick it up until I was coerced into it at our local PFLAG meeting. I found it to be one of those books I just couldn't put down. Her mixture of humor and reality pulls the reader into the world of confusion and uncertainty that is daily fare for the transgender community. For those who haven't experienced it, it's a look at both sides of life from a unique and engaging viewpoint. I recommend it to anyone who seeks to expand their understanding of one of the most elusive segments of the Transgender community—the male to female transsexual.

Strategic Visioning

Begun by initial conversations in the fall of 2000, two members of the Long-Range Strategic Visioning Task Force presented their recommendations to the National Council of Affirmation meeting in Chicago, October 2004. The initial process included listening posts for nearly two years around the US, most related to National Council meetings, some not, as at the RMN Convocation at the University of Puget Sound. The majority of the work of the Task Force was done by conference calls and e-mail under the leadership of Alice Knotts. The Task Force invited individuals to have input into the process by completing an extensive questionnaire/survey. Approximately 200 people participated in the survey in addition to the regional listening posts. Alice resigned from the Task Force in January due to personal commitments, but the work continued by a diverse group of men and women, of different ages and racial ethnic communities.

The National Council received the three-page document and plan on integrating the Goals and Strategies into the life of the organization. The Council did approve a version of the Mission Statement presented by the Task Force.

The Goals and Strategies read in part:

- ◆ Have full membership meetings twice a year
- ◆ Promote stronger interactive web presence
- ◆ Initiate conversations with other caucuses and agencies within the UMC
- ◆ Create a forum for doing theology from a Queer liberationist perspective
- ◆ Continue internal conversations on the differences in ways men and women relate to the world.
- ◆ Initiate and support acts of civil/ecclesiastical disobedience on behalf of LGBT and Queer concerns
- ◆ Initiate and support LGBTQ friendly legislation in the UMC
- ◆ Increase fundraising
- ◆ Increase awareness of Affirmation within and

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regions of the world, but most people living with HIV/AIDS (95%) reside in low- and middle-income countries, where most new HIV infections and AIDS-related deaths occur. HIV is the leading cause of death worldwide among those ages 15-59. The epidemic is considered a threat to the economic well-being and social and political stability of many nations.

At the current rate of infection, South African teenagers have a greater than 50% chance of contracting HIV/AIDS. More than 60% of South Africa's new HIV infections occur before the age of 25. Relatively modest changes in adolescent sexual behavior could substantially curtail the HIV epidemic; and, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation (www.kff.org/hiv/aids), there are hopeful signs that perhaps the worst case projections for the scale of the HIV epidemic in South Africa may yet be averted. On the other hand, there are other projections that by 2010, there could be 42 million children orphaned due to AIDS, with the life expectancy falling below 30 years of age in those countries.

How does racism play into this as homophobia did originally? Some speculate that if these statistics were in predominantly white countries like Canada or Eastern Europe, and primarily affecting other than women and children, there would be a massive move to eradicate the epidemic.

Other links for more information:
<http://gbgm-umc.org/health/wad04/>
<http://www.unaids.org/wad2004/>

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outside the US

- ♦ Hire a staff person who would work on support and communication issues of the organization
- ♦ Create a system of membership and leadership development

What is clear to the existing council is that we have structured our work in a similar manner to the proposals, but to live out the vision, we continue to need more people to step forward to make that vision a reality. We thank the work of the Task Force those who participated in the listening posts, and those who took the time to complete the questionnaire.

Ken Rowe, male co-spokesperson

Voices of Faith: From Swords to Plowshares

Mark your calendars now for "Swords into Plowshares: Voices of Faith 2005." This second Voices of Faith Conference will take place March 31st to April 2nd at the Los Angeles Sheraton Gateway. United Methodists from across the nation will gather to recall and reclaim our vocation as peacemakers.

Provocative theologian and biblical scholar, **Ched Myers**, will anchor the three-day conference by leading us through four one-hour Bible Studies.

Gifted musician, **Jorge Lockward**, will serve as music leader, and help us raise our voices for justice through song.

National and local church leaders and activists will lead workshops, and speak on panels as participants attain tools for transforming society.

ROOMS AT SHERATON GATEWAY

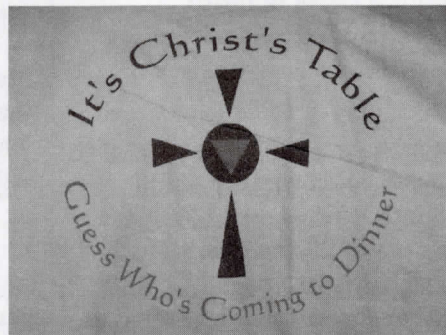
You can reserve your room at the conference rate of \$89 (plus tax) by contacting the Los Angeles Sheraton Gateway Hotel directly by phone at (310) 642-1111. Be sure to give them the "MFSA" code for the room discount rate. The hotel is within one mile of the airport. Free shuttle transportation is available.

The conference will begin promptly at 11am on Thursday with registration opening at 8am, and conclude on Saturday at noon. Several of MFSA's partner organizations are planning gatherings in Los Angeles prior to and after the conference. Therefore, you may want to wait to make your air reservations until plans by these groups have been finalized.

Registration forms and the conference schedule can be downloaded from the MFSA website (www.mfsaweb.org).

Affirmation

AN INDEPENDENT VOICE FOR:
UNITED METHODISTS FOR LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, AND TRANSGENDER CONCERNS



GC 2000 T-Shirts Still Available!

If you never got one of our "It's Christ's Table...Guess Who's Coming To Dinner?" GC 2000 T-shirts, it's not too late! This supply of shirts was ordered as a fundraiser for Strength for the Journey, a Pacific Northwest conference retreat for persons living with AIDS. The shirts are \$13.00 each, and still benefit Strength for the Journey. If you'd like one, send a check made out to Conference Treasurer to: Joanne Brown, [REDACTED] University Place, WA [REDACTED]. Bulk discounts can be arranged by contacting Joanne Brown at [REDACTED].

Valentine Books Reprinted

To honor the five year celebration of the union of Ellie Charlton and Jeanne Barnett this past January, Affirmation has reprinted the *Valentine Book*, first printed in 1998. The book contains news about the 1998 Valentine Celebrations in which churches were encouraged to celebrate *all* unions. The book also has sample union ceremonies. New with this edition are remarks made by Don Fado and Ellie Charlton at Ellie and Jeanne's five year union celebration.

We're asking an \$8.00 donation for copies of the book. In quantities of 10 we're asking \$6.00 each, and in quantities 25 we're asking \$5.00 each. To order, send a check payable to Affirmation to:

Blue Mountain Group
PO Box 3007
Allentown PA 18106

